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AUTHOR Auer, J. Jeffery
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ABSTRACT

Through personal reminiscences, the author chronicles his involvement with the Speech Communication Association and the Central States Speech Association beginning with his attendance at the twentieth annual convention of the National Association of Teachers of Speech in 1933. The author concludes with a recollection and summation of five problems he had identified in a keynote address to the Central States convention in 1978: the lack of attention that the discipline is paying to language; the need to promote freedom of speech as well as ethical communicative behavior; the necessity for constant review of what is being done in the discipline; the need to maintain concern for contemporary communication and criticism; and the urgency for strong commitment in the discipline to the cause of freedom of speech. (HOD)

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A SALUTE - SCA TO CSSA

J. Jeffery Auer

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A SALUTE - SCA to CSSA - J. JEFFERY AUER, APRIL 11, 1981

You were expecting, perhaps, the Godfather? What you get, ladies and gentlemen, is the grandfather...a member of the Geritol generation. And one of our identifying characteristics in experimental situations like this, is our ability to recall not only what happened long ago, but also what we think might have happened, or what we think should have happened. Indeed, when you hear my two colleagues recalling some of the same episodes in our history, you will marvel at the variation in our recollections. For example, I remember hearing what Daniel Webster said in the campaign of 1840, when he was electioneering for William Harrison, Old Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too! Because Harrison had been born in a log cabin, in a speech at Saratoga, New York, Webster felt-himself obliged to apologize because he had not been privileged to be born in a cabin -- but he hastened to assure his listeners that his eldest brothers and sisters had been.

Well, as I was not saying, like Daniel Webster I must begin my direct non-modulated verbal interaction with you by violating one of the cardinal rules of what we used to call public speaking. I am obliged to apologize because -- whatever my two young colleagues may tell you -- I was not present at the first meeting of the Central States Speech Association in 1931. I hasten to assure you that it was not a deliberate slight. It was just that like many college freshmen I have known since, I didn't have my priorities straight.

Five years later, however, in 1933, I had come of age and attended the 20th annual convention of what was then known as the National Association of Teachers of Speech. That name has long since been discarded, and so has the name of the hotel in which we met: the Stevens Hotel, down south on Michigan Boulevard, is now the Conrad Hilton, and the NATS has survived its years as the SAA and is now the SCA. And in the SCA's 67th year my two distinguished friends and I have the honor of bringing you SCA greetings and saluting the CSSA in its 50th year.

As I said, I missed your first regional association convention, but in the year of your fifth one I did attend the national association convention and many of the same people were in attendance. I had drained my resources and paid, in advance, my annual membership fee of $2.50, including subscription to the Quarterly Journal of Speech, and paid an additional 50 cents for which I was promised a copy of the first annual directory of the association. I was met almost at the front door of the Stevens by my Wabash College mentor, W. Norwood Brigance, then serving as first vice-president. He took me by the elbow and escorted me all morning long, trying to see to it that I met everyone. There were 3,031 members of the association that year, and 914 of them attended the convention, jointly sponsored with the American Speech Correction Association and the National Theatre Conference. Briggy did see that I met almost all of them, starting with Arleigh B. Williamson, of NYU,

who was then president, and Enid Miller, of Nebraska Wesleyan University, second vice-president. Unlike our present arrangements, the second-vice-president didn't automatically progress to higher office...but even so I am pleased to say that by then we had already had one woman as president (Henrietta Prentiss, of Hunter College, in 1932) and for 1936 we elected another, Maud May Babcock, of the University of Utah. These SCA milestone women of 1932 and 1936 deserve a salute, especially in a year when Anita Taylor is president of the SCA and Juddi Trent is president-elect of CSSA.

Among all others whose footprints have been too large to measure, I was most delighted that day to meet four members. The first was James O'Neil, first president of the association, and who should be remembered, if for nothing else, because of his presidential address in which he so rightly predicted that "I feel confident that we shall be spared the blight of unanimity for some time to come." The second was James Winans, whose words keynoting the first issue of the Quarterly Journal of Speech had inspired Brigance, who in turn had inspired me. "I hold that by scholarship which is a product of research," Winans wrote, "the standing of our work in the academic world will be improved...We shall not only stand better, but teach better, when we have more scholarship."

The third was A. Craig Baird, a professor at Iowa, but more importantly an alumnus of Wabash College who returned to the campus when I was still a

student and received an honorary degree, attesting to his standing as one of our foremost scholars. Nearly twenty years later my ten year old son would remember him as a distinguished visitor at our house in Virginia who took time out to play catch with him, and with a hard ball, too. The fourth was Clarence Simon, again a man of scholarship. But I remembered him best because he was the critic judge in my first intercollegiate debate, when I was a freshman and our opponent was DePauw. Perhaps what had impressed me most was not that he gave the decision to the right team, but that in return for travelling all the way from Evanston, Illinois, to Crawfordsville, Indiana, in order to judge our debate, this greatly renowned man had been paid the princely fee of fifty dollars.

One of the high points of the convention came on the first day when the founding members of the association were introduced at a general session. Almost all of them were there: my memory excepts only Glenn Newton Merry, Clarion DeWitt Hardy, and Irvah Leslie Winter. Winter was the oldest of the group, born in 1857, and he had died in 1934. You might be interested in recalling that he joined the other sixteen founders in voting, on November 28, 1914, for the critical motion to separate from the National Council of Teachers of English and create a National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking. Nevertheless he spent his career at Harvard University,

content to offer his speech courses under the English department. As Andrew T. Weaver commented on this paradoxical behavior, "he signed our declaration of independence and, in one shining hour, forgot himself into immortality."

After seeing and meeting the founding fathers who had, when I was less than one year old, created an academic profession in which I was to spend my whole life, all of the rest of the 1935 convention was anticlimactic. But for the record I should report that there were sectional meetings on topics that by our day seem almost exhausted: Rhetoric and Public Speaking, Forensic Contests: Methods and Values, Voice Science, The Course in Fundamentals of Speech, School and College Theatre, High School Debate, Changes of Curriculum, Oral Interpretation, Tests and Measurement, High School Dramatics, The Place of Extra-Curricular Speech in the College, and Graduate Study and Research. Other than the founders, those whom I regarded as the "second generation" were among those appearing on these programs, such as: Herbert Wichelns, Ralph Dennis, Alexander Drummond, Hallie Flanagan, William Trufant Foster, E.C. Mabie, James McBurney, Everett Lee Hunt, Hubert Heffner, Winifred Ward, Wilbur Gilman, Gertrude E. Johnson, Lee Norvelle, Sara Stinchfield Hawk, Lee Travis, and my University of Wisconsin graduate school mentor, collaborator, and friend, Henry Lee Ewbank.

Once started, it is difficult to stop a list like this, or one of "third generation" names, for there is no way to convey its true luminosity. It isn't an exercise in name-dropping, in any event, but only my way of witnessing that there is a rich legacy, a constant continuity in our professional associations....as there is in all of life....an endless chain of personal linkages that carries each one of us, no matter how young, back to the bedsprings of our profession. Neither my copy of the program nor my memory records the presence of my two esteemed colleagues, and I will let them speak for themselves. But whether they were in Chicago in December 1935 or not, this was where -- for the last time -- so many of the founders of our 20th century discipline were gathered and thus it remains, for all of us, a memorable meeting place.

We are hearing much these days about the ills of our educational institutions, especially those dependent upon public funding. These maladies are felt to endanger the health of everything related to education, including scholarly investigations, textbook writers and publishers, the job market, and our professional associations, such as the CSSA and the SCA. It occurs to me, therefore, that it might be instructive to consider how well our associations have weathered the tribulations of earlier times. As examples, I would like to recall briefly two SCA wartime conventions.

Within a few weeks after Pearl Harbor we met in the Book-Cadillac Hotel in Detroit, jointly with our friends of the American Speech Correction Association and the American Educational Theatre Association. As against the 1,001 members who had attended our last previous three-association convention in Chicago just two years before, our attendance tumbled to 699, a loss of almost exactly thirty percent. Our first day made the meeting notable. All was seemingly normal when we left our rooms to attend sectional meetings. But when we came back to our rooms in the late afternoon, on each dresser was a candle, a book of matches, and a printed card. It notified us that in case of an enemy air raid the electric power might be knocked out in Detroit, and that we could use the candle, but only after carefully pulling the shade and drawing the drapes.

Despite this ominous introduction to the potential perils of war, we gathered again in 1942, here in Chicago, and in this same hotel. It was not an easy decision. Under the heading "A Call to Duty" the officers noted that "For the second time in the history of The National Association of Teachers of Speech, we are called upon to do our part in supporting our nation in labors of war." They reported that "it seemed for a time early in the year as though the Federal Government might not permit us to hold this convention. But as the national crisis developed it became clear that it was no longer a question of seeking Uncle Sam's permission; it was rather a question of what

were his instructions. We have now received a clear call to assemble." Thus the program carried the assurance that "many national organizations have patriotically suspended convention meetings during this emergency in order that facilities may be available for conventions and conferences that are more helpful in the waging of the war. One of those necessary conventions is ours...a good share of the convention time is to be taken with the consideration of war business. All who can possibly afford to attend this convention should do so." Some of our members had gone into service even before Pearl Harbor, including Robert Gunderson, my colleague at Oberlin College, and we all knew of others who were uniformed before December 1942. Nevertheless, 394 members out of 3,974 attended, almost exactly ten percent. Because of the limited meeting spaces available in the hotel for this 1942 convention the printed program warned that sessions would be crowded, and begged us to remember that if we had to stand up through a meeting we should blame not the management but the enemy.

One of the chief concerns was how the association should modify "business as usual," what business to lay aside and what to take up as seen by our members and by officials from Washington. There were special programs dealing with "What Type of Forensic Programs Will Best Serve a Democracy at War?" and "Oral Interpretation in War-Time." Valentine Windt foreshadowed the Army Special Services and the USO programs in a session on "Special War-time Activities of the Educational Theatre." A series of three programs sponsored by the American Speech Correction Association dealt with "Speech Rehabilitation in War-Injury Cases." The relation between higher education and officer training programs was treated by Ernest H. Reed, on military leave from

Indiana State Teachers College, and assistant director of the Officer Candidate School at Grinnell. He spoke on "Speech Courses for Officers in the Service and Officer Candidates." Donald Hayworth, on leave from Michigan State University, to serve as Chief of the Speakers' Section, Office of Civilian Defense, addressed us on "The Government's War-time Speaking Program and What it Expects of Speech Teachers." Finally the National University Extension Association Committee on Debate looked to the postwar period in a forum on "Federal World Government."

The times were indeed troubled, but members of our profession were willing to face even a sea of troubles in 1942 and do what they could do best in the war effort. As a kind of cheerful footnote, let me add that the program carried a modest announcement about continuing scholarship: a special luncheon would be held at the Central YMCA "In Celebration of the Completion of Studies in American Public Address." Appropriately enough it was chaired by Henry Lee Ewbank, who often later said that the only memorable thing he did as president in 1934 was to appoint William Norwood Brigance as director of these studies. They appeared in 1943 as Volumes I and II in History and Criticism of American Public Address.

With modest attendance there were meetings in 1943, but by 1945, at the old Deshler-Wallick Hotel, in Columbus, Ohio, the three associations again met together for what was proclaimed as their "Reconversion Conference." Out

of a membership of 3,379, 574 were in attendance, or about fifteen percent. This was the last year of an SCA budget under twenty thousand dollars. From 1945 on budgets, memberships, and convention attendance steadily went up.

Joseph Smith, of the University of Utah, was president that year, and the new office of executive vice-president -- established primarily to channel relations with official Washington -- was filled by Hayes Yeager, then of George Washington University. A large number of association members were still in service. For example, out of approximately 500 sustaining members, including women, at least 50 men and 2 women were still on active duty. But at the convention there were some in uniform and others who held civilian positions in the military who reported on some wartime speech services. Navy Lt. William McCord, for example, asked "How Do You Hear Me? Observations and Implications of the Aviation Speech Intelligibility Program" at Corpus Christi, Texas. John W. Black, director of research and training for "voice communication in noise" at the Voice Communication Laboratory at Waco, Texas, introduced nine of his staff members who reported on research designed to improve vocal transmission inside military tanks and battleship boiler rooms and gun turrets. Harold Westlake chaired a panel of reports from Navy and Veteran's Administration personnel on "Speech Rehabilitation of Returning Service Men." Major James H. Parke and Capt. Edwin J. Smith were among those who reported on the Soldier Shows Program, of the Entertainment Section, Special Services

Division, U.S. Army. And one Lt. J. Jeffery Auer, of the U.S. Navy, described "Discussion Programs and Techniques in the Armed Forces."

A desire for a sense of completeness compels me to report that the final speaker in the final general session of that convention was one S.I. Hayakawa, then editor of ETC., proclaiming that "Everybody is a Semanticist." He was many years later sent from California to the United States Senate, and has seldom been heard from since.

Even with my snide remark about SI -- in whose convention hotel room I more than once listened to some of the hottest jazz recordings then extant -- I suggest that any of us who today may despair about our own troubled times and inflation, underfunding, faculty retrenchment, and the passing of the baby boom wave from our classrooms....any such may take courage from the way in which members of our profession faced the equally perilous desection from our classrooms to the military during the years of World War II, and how they adapted our traditional services to national purposes....and came our of the experience even stronger than before.

Despite some obvious tendency to be a nostalgiac at large in society, it is not my intention to walk, year by year, through all of the conventions of our several associations. But I cannot leave memory lane without saying a word about what happened when the SCA had its 50th anniversary. I know something about what took place in 1964 because I was fortunate enough to be the

first vice-president of SCA and the chief program planner. It was our 20th and final joint meeting with our colleagues in the American Educational Theatre Association, and at the banquet Sam Selden of that association made it an almost tearful farewell, Paul Kozelka was the program planner for AETA meetings, to do it up right, ten other organizations cooperated in the Golden Anniversary effort. Merrill T. Baker, then of the University of South Dakota, represented the Central States Speech Association in our planning; George Ziegelmueller of Wayne State University spoke for the American Forensic Association; and C.J. Dover, of the Chrysler Corporation, helped plan for the National Society for the Study of Communication (now the ICA). The nineteen interest groups of the SCA each had program planners, too. Until the academic blood recently began to flow at the University of Wisconsin from wounds open by the Wisconsin State governor, I had forgotten that my program adviser for Radio-Television-Film was one Lee S. Dreyfus. A now happier memory is that the Discussion and Group Methods was represented by William S. Howell.

Although we didn't have enough imagination to select a conference theme, as you all have done for this year, it was a happy and noisy convention. It was a crowded one. Some of you may know the old La Salle Hotel here in Chicago. It still stands, though on somewhat shakier foundations than before the SCA Golden Anniversary Convention. The explanation is simply that in keeping with what then seemed a brilliant and forward looking scheme, we had

set up a ten-year convention plan, with cities and hotels all booked in advance. What was wrong with the plan was that less than a year before we scheduled into the old and commodious Morrison Hotel for our 1964 convention, it closed its doors, and by the time we arrived in Chicago it was partly torn down, to make room for a new sky-scraping bank building. On such short notice the only hotel in Chicago that could even begin to accomodate us was the La Salle and somehow we squeezed in SCA, AETA, and ten satellite organizations. To give you some idea of what a squeeze it was, the hotel where we are meeting today has more than two and a half times as many rooms at the La Salle. Thus there was good reason why it was difficult to count attendance that year. In fact, there is only one other convention since 1921 for which we do not have a certifiable record of how many people were on hand. For the Golden Anniversary Convention the national office can only say that it was somewhere near 2,500.

Robert Oliver was president that year, having just succeeded Ernest Wrage, and John Black was scheduled to succeed me. Somewhere late one night, relaxing after a hectic day of meetings the four of us discovered that we represented a Unitarian era in SCA administration. What almost everyone in attendance discovered late one night after the Convention Banquet, was the sensational Convention Cabaret in the Grand Ballroom, featuring Frankie Masters and his orchestra.

For me the convention was a melange of 438 different persons who took part in 115 sectional meeetings, and who can count how many scheduled committee meetings, business meetings, luncheons, and banquets, to say nothing of ad hoc trysts. To return to my theme -- if you have noticed that I have one -- let me say that the high point of that convention, like this one, was the great and continuing testimonial given to scholarship. That element of our concern was most dramatically demonstrated in 1964 when we finally formulated our plans for the Golden Anniversary Prize Fund Award to honor those members who excel in scholarly research and the writing of books and monographs of true distinction. When we remind ourselves that this research not only undergirds our scholarly status but also our primary commitment to the improvement of public and private discourse, I'm sure we will all agree that it overshadows everything else at the conventions of our regional as well as our national associations.

Those of you who read the description of this meeting in the printed program will know that each of us was charged not only with looking backward into our professional past, but also with trying to see in the years ahead. Perhaps you also recall the character in Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth," who said: "It's easy to foretell the future -- what's difficult is to understand the past." Thus you will see that I have come to the easy part of this speech. I plan to make it easy, and brief, by referring back to something I said three years ago in the keynote address to this Central States convention.

There may be some who will recall that I then identified five what seemed to me to be pressing problems for our discipline, each a part of our inheritance

and in 1978 still at issue. What I propose to do now is to summarize my earlier description of each of these problems, comment on their present status, and ask whether they still remain to be solved in our future. During rehearsal time with Eleanor Auer she told me that this would take too much time. I replied that I could do it in not more than six sentences for each point, like Willia Howard said about learning to speak French in five easy lessons -- and one hard one. On your behalf she bet me that I couldn't do it. If she's in the audience, I want her to start counting.

In the first place, I argued that our discipline was paying far too little attention to language, the basic currency of speech communication, and I deplored our apparent tolerance of sexist terminology, professional jargon, barbarous and trendy usages, and lowered standards of pronunciation. As we have all listened during the past three years to our leading politicians in public, to students in our classes, and to our acquaintances in social gatherings, there must surely be few of us who have heard significant improvements. And just as surely, we risk losing the beauty, the precision, and the motive power of language for all time -- and with it the capacity for clear thinking and speaking -- if we do not attack this problem.

In the second place, I touched upon the concern expressed by some that all teachers should be required to instruct students in public morality along with the skills of their discipline. This concern, whatever the proclaimed good intentions of its exponents, has led, in libraries and classrooms across this nation, to a campaign of censorship, according to some private conception of

morality, of books, reading lists, and of the ideas that they contain. Our colleagues in the American Library Association and the National Council of Teachers of English have carefully documented an enormous increase in the enormity of censorship during these past three years. But it is not their problem alone. It is ours, too, and we must not only persuade our students that their communicative behavior should be effective and ethical, but see to it that they are encouraged to think and to speak straightforwardly on our campuses and in our classrooms, without fear of censorship or censors.

In the third place, I urged that we constantly review what it is that we are really all about in our discipline, that we keep a steady focus on what we do that is not done in our sister disciplines. It seems to me that there is some evidence that more of my colleagues, more convention papers and more journal articles are trying to do just that. There appears to be a lessening of dilettantish dabbling with peripheral matters, a growing determination to expand and apply the theories that we already have, and in general -- if I may use a much-abused term in a good cause -- to get back to the basics of our discipline. That I take it to include the twin arts of analysis and synthesis of ideas, information and attitudes, for use in communicating creatively and responsibly in public and private discourse. For those who think this is not our most important task, retirement cannot come too soon.

In the fourth place, I expressed concern that although the history of the spoken word would never lose its personal fascination for me, or its importance for our scholars, we were not sufficiently concerned with communication in the

world in which we now live. I think we must continue to be sensitive to the necessity of maintaining a concern for contemporary communication, contemporary criticism, and contemporary modes and codes. But I am persuaded that public and private speakers of today are not being ignored either in theory or in practice, and we can take the species off the endangered list.

In the fifth place, I openly agitated for conviction and action by every listener in the cause of freedom of speech. We were meeting in 1978 in the shadow cast by the threatened Nazi march in Skokie, and I asked you then "if the American Civil Liberties Union becomes too busy to stick up for the First Amendment, who will?" Today I repeat the question, and I fear it will have to be asked again and again in all of our long tomorrows: "If you are too busy to stick up for the First Amendment, as we meet in new shadows cast by the Moral Majority, in old ones newly darkened by the Ku Klux Klan, and by a whole rag-bag of demagogues and anti-intellectuals . . . if you have neither the time nor the inclination to take on these offenders to a good society, then who will? And how will you explain to the speech communication conventions of the future the triumph of the rabble-rousers and the curtailment of civil liberties?"

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I call your attention to a sixth and apparently new problem: the care and feeding of speakers who have the temerity to interpret the past and foretell the future.